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ABSTRACT

A survey of parents of 1269 students in 82 first, third, and fifth grade classrooms in Maryland was conducted to investigate the effects (on parents) of parent involvement techniques (used by teachers) for learning activities at home. Some of the teachers were recognized by their principal for their leadership in the use of parent involvement, while other teachers frequently used parent involvement, and some used few, if any, parent involvement techniques. Survey results indicate that parents have generally positive attitudes about their child's school and teacher. However, many parents receive few or no communications from the school, few are involved at the school, and most believe that schools could do more to involve parents in home learning activities. It was also found that teacher-leaders used parent involvement practices more often and more equitably with parents of all educational levels. Parents of children with teachers who frequently use home learning activities are more aware of teachers' efforts, receive more ideas from teachers, know more about their child's instructional program, and rate the teacher higher in interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality. Other types of parent involvement, such as routine communications from the school or parent involvement at the school, do not have as strong or consistent effects on parents.
(Author/CJB)

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Report No. 346
October 1983

EFFECTS ON PARENTS OF TEACHER PRACTICES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Joyce L. Epstein

The Johns Hopkins University

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Introductory Statement

The Center for Social Organization of Schools (CSOS) has two primary objectives: to develop a scientific knowledge of how schools affect their students, and to use this knowledge to develop better school practices and organization.

The Center works through three research programs to achieve its objectives:

The School Organization Program investigates how school and classroom organization affects student learning and other immediate outcomes of schooling. Current studies focus on parental involvement, microcomputers in schools, use of time in schools, cooperative learning, and other organizational strategies that alter the task, reward, authority and peer group structures in schools and classrooms.

The Education and Work Program examines the relationship between schooling and students' later-life occupational and educational successes. Current projects include studies of the competencies required in the workplace, the sources of training and experience that lead to employment, college students' major field choices, and employment of urban minority youth.

The Schools and Delinquency Program studies the problems of crime, violence, vandalism, and disorder in schools and the role that schools play in delinquency. Ongoing projects address the development of a theory of delinquent behavior, school effects on delinquency, and the evaluation of delinquency prevention programs in and out of schools.

CSOS also supports a Fellowships in Education Research program that provides opportunities for talented researchers to conduct and publish significant research in conjunction with the three research programs.

This report, prepared by the School Organization Program, presents results of a survey of parents on the effects of teacher practices of parent involvement.

ABSTRACT

A survey of parents of 1269 students in 82 first, third, and fifth grade teachers' classrooms in Maryland was conducted to address the question: What are the effects on parents of teacher practices of parent involvement in learning activities at home? The parents had children in classsrooms of teachers who differed in their emphasis on parent involvement. Some of the teachers were recognized by their principal for their leadership in the use of parent involvement; other teachers frequently used parent involvement; and some used few if any parent involvement techniques.

Results of the survey of parents show that parents have generally positive attitudes about their child's school and teacher. However, many parents receive few or no communications from the school, few are involved at the school, and most believe that the schools could do more to involve parents in learning activities at home that would benefit their child. Teacher-leaders used parent involvement practices more often and more equitably with parents of all educational levels.

Parents with children in classrooms of teachers who frequently use home learning activities are more aware of teachers' efforts, receive more ideas from teachers, know more about the child's instructional program and rate the teacher higher in interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality. Other types of parent involvement -- such as routine communications from the school or parent involvent at the school -- do not have as strong and consistent effects on parents.

Acknowledgments

We are very grateful to the families who participated in this survey and to the teachers and principals who helped us contact the children's families. Studies of schools and families require the kinds of cooperative efforts and understanding that we received from the participating schools and communities.

I am indebted to my colleague Henry Jay Becker who shared responsibility for the design and data collection of the study and offered suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. Thanks, too, to John H. Hollifield for editorial advice and Denise Caputo, Barbara Hucksoll, and Hazel Kennedy for assistance in the preparation of this manuscript.

EFFECTS ON PARENTS OF TEACHER PRACTICES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Teachers vary in their use of parent involvement practices. Some teachers believe that they can be most effective if they obtain parental assistance on learning activities at home. Others believe they can be effective teachers without asking parents to spend time at home on school activities with their children. In earlier research we studied how 3698 teachers in grades 1, 3, and 5 in 600 elementary schools in 16 districts in Maryland used parent involvement techniques, and what they believed were the benefits and problems of involving parents in learning activities at home (Becker and Epstein, 1982a; Epstein and Becker, 1982).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM SURVEY OF TEACHERS

- Almost two-thirds of the teachers reported that they involved parents in reading activities at home with their children many times a year, but fewer than one-third frequently asked parents to conduct informal learning games or other activities with their children at home. Fewer than 5% asked parents to use TV programs at home for discussion or learning activities.

- Teachers of younger elementary school students (Grade 1) used more techniques more often than teachers of older students (Grades 3 and 5).

- About equal numbers of teachers <u>actively used</u> parent involvement practices with parents who had few years, an average number of years, and many years of education. However, teachers who <u>did not use</u> parent involvement practices tended to believe that parents with less education could not or would not assist with learning activities at home. Some teachers had worked out activities to involve all families regardless of the educational level of the parents.

- If there were some active parents <u>in the school</u>, teachers had more positive attitudes about parent involvement and included parents more often in learning activities <u>at home</u>.

- Many teachers were concerned that there was not enough time for teachers, parents, or students to conduct learning activities at home that would benefit the students, parents or teachers. Other teachers were convinced that measurable benefits to all parties resulted from parent involvement at home.

Teachers' reports about their beliefs and practices tell only half the story of parent involvement. Parents' reports and studies of effects on student achievement and development are required for the full story. Teachers have strong opinions about whether they think parents want to be involved, and about whether parents with different skills and family responsibilities can be successful if they are asked to help their children in school-related activities at home. But only parents can verify or clarify their experiences with and expectations for parent involvement.

SURVEY OF PARENTS

Parents of 1269 students in 82 first, third, and fifth grade classrooms in Maryland completed and returned questionnaires on the parent involvement practices of their children's teachers. The response rate to the mail survey was 59% of the parents in these classrooms.

The teachers of these parents' children included 36 "case" teachers who were identified in the survey of teachers as strong supporters and users of parent involvement in learning activities at home; and 46 "control" teachers who did not emphasize parent involvement, but who matched the "case" teachers in their teaching assignment by grade level, school district, years of teaching experience, estimated achievement level of

the students in their classes, and average education of their students' parents. Among the "case" teachers, 17 were recognized by their principals as especially strong leaders in the use of parent involvement in learning activities at home. These teachers are called "teacher-leaders" in this report. Thus, parents' experiences with three types of teachers were studied: confirmed teacher-leaders, other "case" teachers who were users of parent involvement, and "control" teachers who did not emphasize parent involvement. In this report, "parent involvement" refers to the participation by parents in twelve types of learning activities at home that are used by teachers in conjunction with the child's instructional program at school.

Among the most frequently mentioned expected benefits of parent involvement are the increased, improved or sustained interest and support of parents (Gordon, 1979; Keesling and Melaragno, 1983; Mager, 1980; Morrison, 1978; Rich and Jones, 1977; Robinson, 1979; Sowers, Lang and Gowett, 1980). Little has been done, however, to link specific teachers' practices with the parents who experience them, or to measure differences in attitudes and behaviors of parents whose children are in classrooms of teachers with different philosophies and practices of parent involvement. This study makes the connection between the teachers and their students' parents. The results should inform teachers whether their practices are recognized by their students' parents and whether their efforts have any measurable effects on parents. The results should inform parents about the effects of programs that have been or could be introduced in their children's schools.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Table 1 describes the characteristics of parents who returned questionnaires. Families were instructed that the parent most familiar with the child's school and teacher should complete the survey. Over 90% of the "most-knowledgeable" parents were female. Other background and family characteristics showed a representative mix of the families served by Maryland's schools. About one-fourth of the parents had some high school education but no diploma, almost one-third graduated from high school, about one-fifth attended some college, and about one-fourth graduated from college or attended graduate school. About one-fourth of the sample were single parents. About two-fifths of the respondents did not work outside the home; about one-fifth worked part-time; and another two-fifths had full-time jobs outside the home. About one-third of the sample were black.

There were differences between the parents who responded to the survey and those who did not. More parents whose children were above average in math and reading skills in school returned the survey than did parents of children doing average or below average work in these subjects. Regardless of how children fared academically, the response was greater from parents whose children were in the classrooms of teachers who were leaders in parent involvement. Returning the questionnaire indicates parental cooperation on important requests from the teacher, and may reflect the responses of parents to other requests for parent involvement in learning activities at home (Becker, 1982).

Table 1

Characteristics of Parents

(N=1269)

Parent Characteristics	% Respondents
Grade Level of Children:	
Grade K, 1, 2	45
Grade 3, 4	27
Grade 5, 6	28
Sex of Respondent:	
Female	92
Male	8
Race of Respondent:	
White	62
Black	36
Other	2
Highest Education of Respondent:	
Some High School (or less)	25
High School Diploma	28
Some College	20
Bachelor's Degree	10
Some Graduate School (or advanced degree)	17
Family Structure:	
Two-parent home	76
One-parent home	24
Employment:	
Not working	39
Part-time work	18
Full-time work	43

The differences in return rates from different groups of parents have offsetting effects. Parents whose children are in classrooms of teachers who emphasize parent involvement tend to be more positive about school than other parents, but parents of high-achieving students tend to be more critical of school and teachers than other parents. Statistical methods were used that take into account multiple characteristics of parents, teachers, and students in order to isolate effects of teachers' practices of parent involvement on parents. The minor differences in return rates from some parents do not seriously affect the usefulness of data from the widely diverse, large sample of parents characterized in Table 1. The data from the full sample of parents were used to address five questions:

- What are the attitudes of parents toward public schools and teachers?
- What are the parents' experiences with and reactions to involvement in learning activities at home?
- How do parents' reactions and experiences differ based on their own educational backgrounds, and based on the educational level of all of the parents of the classroom population?
- What are the effects on parents of parent involvement in learning activities at home, and how do the effects differ for parents whose children are in the classrooms of teachers who are and are not "leaders" in the use of parent involvement practices?
- What do the responses from parents mean to schools and to families?

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Generally Positive Support

Parents' attitudes toward the public elementary schools and their children's teachers were remarkably positive. About ninety percent of the parents agreed that their children's elementary schools were well run. Almost as many felt comfortable at their child's school and believed that they and the teachers had the same goals for the child. They overwhelmingly agreed that teachers should involve parents in learning activities at home and that homework was useful for their children. This general support for the schools, teachers, and for homework is a strong vote of confidence in the schools.

The clearly positive attitudes seem to counter recent national reports that have criticized the curricula, teachers, and standards in the public schools (National Commission on Excellence, 1983; National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, 1983). The reports from parents in Maryland are more like the findings of the recent Gallup, 1983, poll in which only 9% of respondents with children in public schools said that getting good teachers was a problem in the schools, only 9% cited parents' lack of interest, and only 1% reported problems with administrators. Although there are some problems in all schools, most parents in the Gallup poll were not concerned about the basic administration of the schools, with parent involvement, or with the quality of teachers. They found fewer problems with their own local elementary schools than with other public schools (Gallup, 1982, 1983; Goodlad, 1983). Parents who used the public schools rated those schools

higher than did other citizens, and parents who used the private schools praised the quality of the private schools (Gallup,1982).

There were no significant differences in the attitudes about the public schools of parents with children in classrooms of teacher-leaders vs. other teachers, as shown in Table 2. Thus, the parent-involvement practices of teachers did not influence the general attitudes of parents about their schools.

Teachers Could Do More

Despite positive attitudes about the schools and teachers in general, parents reported that teachers could do more to involve parents in learning activities at home. Fewer than 30% of the parents reported that teachers gave them most of their ideas of how to help their child in reading and math. About 20% of the parents reported that the teacher never made frequent use of any practices that involve parents in learning activities at home. Another 38% percent said the teachers used very few techniques regularly. About 15% reported that the teacher never wanted them to help the child with homework. By contrast, over 80% of the parents said they could spend more time (an average of 44 minutes) if they were shown how to do specific home learning activities.

Parents had mixed attitudes about teachers' interpersonal skills. Most (77%) said their contacts with teachers were cooperative, but over 40% did not find "respect" or "warmth" in their relations with teachers.

Overall, the responses from parents suggest relatively high support for the public elementary schools, positive attitudes toward teachers,

Table 2

Parents' Attitudes Toward School and Parent Involvement
In Classrooms of Teacher-Leaders and Other Teachers

Parents' Attitudes		% Parents Disagree	% Parents Tend to Agree	% Parents Strongly Agree
The school my child attends is generally well run.	Teacher-leaders	10.3	20.2	69.5
	Other teachers (N.S.)[a/]	9.8	23.1	67.2
I feel comfortable spending time at my child's school[b/]	Teacher-leaders	13.0	12.2	74.8
	Other teachers (N.S.)[a/]	12.4	16.9	70.8
This teacher and I have the same goals for my child.[b/]	Teacher-leaders	14.3	17.4	68.2
	Other teachers (N.S.)[a/]	14.2	21.4	64.4
I feel I've had enough training to help my child with reading and math problems.[b/]	Teacher-leaders	26.5	19.2	54.2
	Other teachers (N.S.)[a/]	31.1	15.8	53.1
Teachers should try to show parents how to help the child learn things at home.[b/]	Teacher-leaders	8.8	16.8	74.4
	Other teachers (N.S.)[a/]	7.1	17.1	75.7

[a/] No significant difference between parents with children in classrooms of teacher-leader or other teachers.

[b/] These items were phrased negatively in the survey to minimize response bias. All items have been stated positively in this table for purposes of comparison.

some dissatisfaction with how some teachers interact with parents, and an untapped supply of parent assistance with learning activities at home. Other recent evaluations with more limited samples or measures also reported generally positive attitudes of parents of public school children toward the curriculum (Klein, Tye, and Wright, 1979) parent involvement and homework (Olmsted, Wetherby, Leler, and Rubin, 1982; Williams, 1983).

PARENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Involvement in Basic Obligations

Parents cooperate with the schools through basic family management of children's school supplies and activities. Over 97% said that their children had the supplies they need for school, and over 90% reported that their children had a regular place to do homework. These management chores are expected by the schools and are accepted as responsibilities by most parents. Over 85% of the parents spent 15 minutes or more helping their children on homework activities when they were asked to do so by the teacher. This is comparable to other studies. In Zill and Petersen's, 1982, survey, 83% of parents helped their children, aged 7 to 11, with homework.

Involvement at School

One prevalent form of parent involvement is parental assistance in school-related activities -- in the classroom as an aide to teachers; in other school locations such as the cafeteria, library or playground; or

at special events, such as class parties or trips or fund raisers. Some parents participate in some of these activities at school, but most parents are not active at school:

- About 70% never helped the teacher in the classroom or on class trips.
- About 70% never participated in fund raising activities for the school.
- About 88% never assisted in the library, cafeteria or other school areas.

These percentages show clearly that most parents cannot or do not become involved at school. Even those who did become active were involved infrequently. The average number of days per year involved at school were:

- 4.1 days helping the teacher and class
- 7.0 days helping fund raising activities
- 3.5 days helping school cafeteria, offices, library

Only about 4% of the respondents (51 parents distributed across 82 classrooms) were very active, spending over 25 days per year at the school or on school business.

Many (42%) of the parents who were not active at school worked outside the home during school hours. Others had small children, family problems, or other activities that demanded their time. Others (about 12%) simply had not been asked to assist at school.

Athough participation in school and on committees is the most common type of parent involvement, most parents are not included in these activities, and others are only infrequently involved (Epstein, in press; Ogbu,1974). In contrast, most parents are involved daily for at least short periods of time with their children at home.

Involvement in School-to-Home Communiciations

Communications from the school to the home is sometimes considered a "parent involvement" program, but is more accurately a "parent information" program or courtesy. All schools send basic information home to the family about school schedules, report card grades, and school activities. Some schools organize and require teacher-parent conferences for all parents; others hold conferences only with some parents at the request of the teachers or parents. A few schools support home visits by teachers or teacher aides to inform parents about school procedures or teaching techniques or to provide family services (Becker and Epstein, 1982a).

Some traditional forms of communications go from the school to all families. Other communications go from teachers to only some parents, based on the behavior and achievement of the children. In the Maryland sample, about 16% of the parents said they received no memos from their child's teacher, over 35% had no parent-teacher conference, and about 60% never spoke to the teacher on the phone. Table 3 indicates clearly that fewer parents received personal communications and opportunities for interaction that required more teachers' and parents' time. This is not surprising, but the table illustrates how large numbers of parents

Table 3

Percent of parents who never experienced personal communications from child's teacher over one year.

	% Never
Memo from teacher	16.4
Talk to teacher before or after school	20.7
Conference with teacher	36.4
Handwritten note from teacher	36.5
Workshop at school	59.0
Called on phone by teacher	59.5
Visited at home by teacher	96.3

can be excluded from the traditional forms of communication that link the home and school.

Involvement with Learning Activities at Home

Parents were asked about the frequency of their experiences with twelve techniques that teachers use to involve parents in learning activities at home. These were grouped under five categories: (a) techniques that involve reading and books; (b) techniques that encourage discussions between parents and children; (c) techniques based on informal activities and games that use common materials at home; (d) techniques based on formal contracts and supervision among parents, teachers, and children; and (e) techniques that involve tutoring and teaching the child in skills and drills. Teachers, in an earlier survey, rated these techniques as their most satisfying and successful parent involvement practices (Becker and Epstein, 1982a).

Most frequent requests to parents. Parents most frequently experienced five parent involvement activities, as shown in Figure 1. Over one-fourth of the parents said they were asked very often to conduct specific reading, discussion, tutoring and monitoring activities. The five most frequent practices were: reading aloud or listening to the child read, talking with the child about the events of the school day, giving spelling or math drills, giving help on worksheets or workbooks, and signing the child's homework. The frequent use of these techniques for some parents is countered by the fact that from one-fourth to two-fifths of the parents were never asked to conduct the five most frequently used activities.

Figure 1

Parents' Reports of Frequency of Teacher's Reqursts for Parent Involvement Techniques

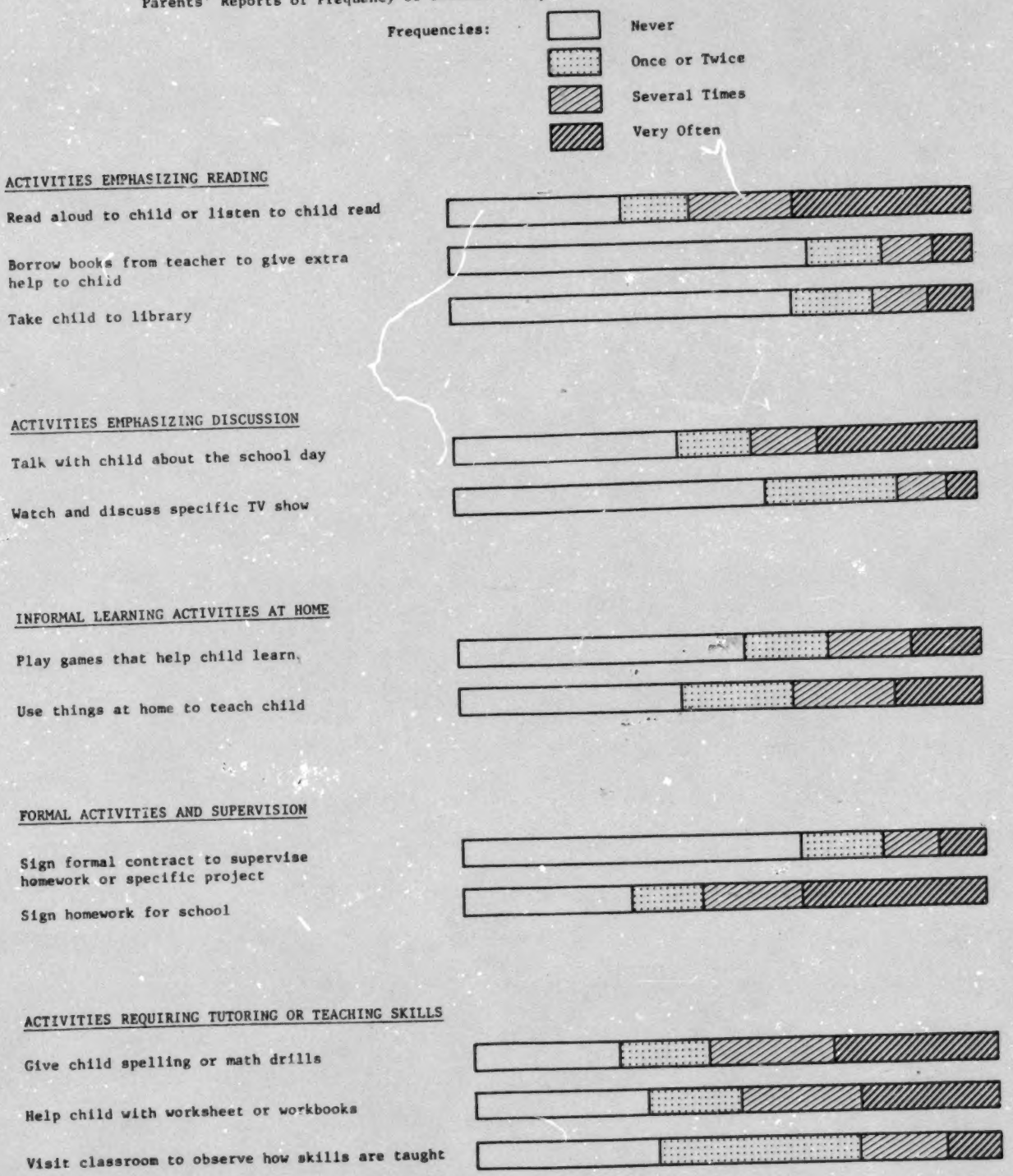

Frequencies:
Never
Once or Twice
Several Times
Very Often
ACTIVITIES EMPHASIZING READING
Read aloud to child or listen to child read
Borrow books from teacher to give extra help to child
Take child to library
ACTIVITIES EMPHASIZING DISCUSSION
Talk with child about the school day
Watch and discuss specific TV show
INFORMAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME
Play games that help child learn
Use things at home to teach child
FORMAL ACTIVITIES AND SUPERVISION
Sign formal contract to supervise homework or specific project
Sign homework for school
ACTIVITIES REQUIRING TUTORING OR TEACHING SKILLS
Give child spelling or math drills
Help child with worksheet or workbooks
Visit classroom to observe how skills are taught

Table 4 shows significant differences in parental reports about the teacher-leaders in parent involvement and other teachers. Parents with children in classrooms of teachers who were leaders in parent involvement reported significantly more frequent use of nine of the twelve parent involvement practices than did other parents. These included the five most frequently used practices -- reading, discussing, giving drills and practice, helping on worksheets, signing homework -- and four others -- taking the child to the library, playing learning games, using things at home to teach, and visiting the classroom to learn how to teach. On the three least-used practices -- borrowing books, entering contracts, and using TV for learning -- there were no significant differences in reports from parents of teachers who were leaders compared to other teachers.

The survey of teachers and the survey of parents indicate that the use of TV for home learning activities, although rarely used, is a potentially useful technique. Families have many opportunities for conversation and discussions, and TV shows could be used to structure parent-child discussions to build children's listening, speaking, and analytical skills. Only 2% of the teachers in the state-wide survey used this technique frequently, though about 60% said the technique could be useful in their teaching practice (Becker and Epstein, 1982a). Only 5% of the parents in the 82 case and control teachers' classrooms said they were asked often to listen to and discuss TV shows with their children.

Table 4

Percent of parents reporting teachers' frequent use of twelve parent involvement techniques by teacher-leaders and other teachers.

Activity	Percent of parents reporting frequent use by [a/] Teacher-leaders	Other teachers	χ^2 test significance [b/]
1. Read aloud to child or listen to child read	68	51	***
2. Sign child's homework	66	52	***
3. Give spelling or math drills	61	54	*
4. Help with worksheet or workbook lessons	57	47	**
5. Ask child about school day	49	42	*
6. Use things at home to teach child	44	34	**
7. Play games that help child learn	35	28	**
8. Visit classroom to watch how child is taught	34	25	**
9. Take child to library	26	17	**
10. Borrow books from teacher to give extra help	21	16	--
11. Make a formal contract with teacher to supervise homework or projects	21	19	--
12. Watch and discuss TV shows with child	15	15	--

[a/] Frequent use means the parents' reported the teacher wanted them to conduct the activity several times or very often.

[b/] χ^2 tests indicate proportionately more parents report frequent use by teacher-leaders than by other teachers, with *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$.

The responses of parents and teachers cannot be compared directly because some techniques (i.e. drills, worksheets or workbooks) were added to the survey of parents based on suggestions from teachers. We can conclude, however, that:

- The most popular techniques reported by teachers (reading aloud, discussions, signing work) were the ones most frequently experienced by parents.
- The least popular techniques for teachers (use of TV, use of formal contracts) were least frequently experienced by parents.
- Only 5% of the parents said the teacher required them to help at home. Other parents felt they were expected to help or that it was up to them whether or not they did what the teacher suggested. There was little follow-up by teachers to see if and how well parents assisted in learning activities at home. These reports from parents match those from teachers that indicated that few teachers required parents to assist their children at home (Becker and Epstein 1982a).

The similarity of teachers' practices and parents' experiences lends credibility to the reports of both groups.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND PARENT EDUCATIONAL LEVELS

The survey of teachers found interesting relationships between the teachers' uses of and attitudes about parent involvement and the level of education of parents. Teachers who were highly active users of parent involvement were not limited by the education of their children's parents -- the highly active users included teachers who taught children from mainly college educated, mainly high school educated, and mainly less than high school educated families. In contrast, teachers who were not active users of parent involvement were differently affected by the educational level of their children's parents. If they taught children

from mainly high-educated families, the less active teachers reported that parent involvement techniques could be useful, but that they preferred other teaching strategies. If they taught children from mainly low-educated families, the less-active teachers were more apt to report that the parents would not be able or willing to assist their children with learning activities at home (Becker and Epstein, 1982a).

Some teachers had worked out ways to organize and involve parents of all educational levels in learning activities at home. Other teachers, who had not worked out such procedures, viewed parents with less education in a very different light -- as unable or unwilling parents.

Two questions were addressed with the data from parents to clarify the patterns of results obtained from teachers:

1. How do parents with college, high school, and less than high school education report teachers' practices and their own involvement? How does the average educational level of all the parents in the classroom affect reports of teacher practices of parent involvement?

2. At each educational level, how do parents' reports differ if their children's teachers <u>are</u> or <u>are not</u> leaders in parent involvement?

<u>Parent Education at the Individual Level</u>

Table 5 shows the percent of frequent use by teachers of parent involvement practices reported by parents at three educational levels. The top half of the table indicates the overall frequency of use of

Table 5

Reports from Parents on Teachers' Practices of Parent Involvement, by Parents' Education and by Teachers' Leadership in Parent Involvement Techniques

Parent Education[a]	Number of Parent Involvement Techniques Used Frequently by Teachers		
	None	Some	Many
High	23%	40%	37%
Average	15%	39%	46%
Low	16%	30%	54%

$\chi^2 = 25.98$; $p < .001$

Parent Education[a] and Teacher Leadership	Number of Parent Involvement Techniques Used Frequently by Teachers[b]		
	None	Some	Many
High Ed.; Tch Ldr.	6%	42%	52%
High Ed.; Tch Not Ldr.	25%	40%	35%
Avg. Ed.; Tch Ldr.	9%	35%	56%
Avg. Ed.; Tch Not Ldr.	17%	40%	43%
Low Ed.; Tch Ldr.	18%	26%	56%
Low Ed.: Tch Not Ldr.	17%	31%	52%

χ^2 (Tch Ldr.) = 4.55; p .34 (NS)

χ^2 (Tch Not Ldr) = 18.45; $p < .001$

Parent Education[a]	Frequency of Teachers' Requests to READ TO or hear child READ[c]		
	Never	Some	Often
High	41%	12%	47%
Average	25%	15%	60%
Low	30%	10%	60%

$\chi^2 = 29.39$; $p < .001$

Parent Education[a] Teacher Leadership	Frequency of Teachers' Requests to READ TO or Hear Child READ[c]		
	Never	Some	Often
High Ed.; Tch Ldr.	27%	8%	65%
High Ed.; Tch Not Ldr.	42%	13%	45%
Avg. Ed.; Tch Ldr.	20%	7%	73%
Avg. Ed.; Tch Not Ldr.	27%	17%	56%
Low Ed.; Tch Ldr.	33%	6%	61%
Low Ed.; Tch Not Ldr.	30%	11%	59%

χ^2 (Tch Ldr) = 3.91; p .42 (NS)

χ^2 (Tch Not Ldr) = 21.97; $p < .001$

[a] Low-education includes parents with some high school education (N=240); average education includes parents with a high school diploma (N=462); high education includes parents with at least some college education and beyond (N=543).

[b] Frequency refers to use of twelve parent involvement techniques described on page : None=frequent use of 0 techniques; Some=frequent use of 1-4 techniques; Many=frequent use of 5-12 techniques.

[c] Frequency refers to use of home learning activity of reading aloud or listening to child read: Never=never requested of parents; Some=requested once, twice or several times; Often=frequently requested of parents.

twelve practices of parent involvement. The bottom half of the table focuses on the most popular practice of reading aloud to the child or listening to the child read. The left half of the table presents the responses of parents with little schooling, average schooling, and advanced schooling. The right half further divides the parents into those parents whose children's teachers are and are not teacher-leaders in the use of parent involvement practices.

The top left panel of the table shows that, in general, parents with less education reported significantly more frequent requests from teachers than do parents with average or advanced education. The top right panel explains that the differences in reports from parents with different levels of education were significant only for parents with children in classrooms of teachers who <u>are not leaders</u> in the use of parent involvement. In classrooms with teachers who <u>are leaders</u>, parents at all educational levels reported similar frequencies of requests by teachers to conduct learning activities at home.

The bottom of the page shows that the pattern of responses for one of the items among the 12 parent involvement activities -- teachers' requests for parents to assist the child by reading aloud or listening to the child read aloud at home -- is the same as the general pattern for all twelve techniques. The bottom left panel shows that, in general, average- and less-educated parents reported significantly more requests from teachers than do high-educated parents concerning reading at home. The bottom right panel clarifies this by showing that the differences in the reports from low- and high-educated parents were signi-

ficant only for parents whose children are in classrooms of teachers who are not leaders in using parent involvement practices. The same pattern was found for other parent involvement activities -- including discussion, contracts, informal games, worksheets, and signing homework.

Teachers who are and are not leaders in the use of parent involvement made requests of parents with little education with about the same frequency, but teachers who are leaders in parent involvement made considerably more demands than other teachers on parents with average and high education. According to these reports, if the teacher is a leader in parent involvement practices, then parents at all educational levels are affected by the teachers' emphasis.

The reports from parents clarify and extend the earlier information from teachers on their use of parent involvement with differently educated parents. Teachers who were active users of parent involvement practices said they used the techniques about equally whether they taught mainly high, average or low-educated parents. From the parents we learn that within these teachers' classrooms, parents with college, high school, and less than high school education reported similar numbers of requests for involvement by teachers.

Teachers who are not leaders in parent involvement more often reported that less educated parents could not or would not be able or willing to conduct learning activities at home. Yet, in these teachers' classrooms, it was the parents with less education -- not the well-educated parents -- who more often said that they were being asked frequently to assist with learning activities at home.

These results have several possible explanations. Teachers who are leaders in the use of parent involvement practices may establish more equitable and thorough parental assistance programs, regardless of the educational levels of the parents. Teachers who are leaders in parent involvement may have procedures to reach all or most parents with an organized program of activities. Rich, Van Dien, and Mattox, 1979, refer to this philosophy and teaching strategy as a "non-deficit approach" to parent involvement.

Teachers who are not leaders in parent involvement may not try to reach all parents. They may see little need to approach parents whose children are doing well in school or parents who are able to help their children at home without instruction from the teacher. Children of parents with less education are more likely to do less well in school, and parents with less formal schooling are less likely to assist their children in school learning without teachers' instructions. This means that teachers may ask less-educated parents to assist their children at home even if the teachers do not believe that these parents will be fully successful in their efforts. Scott-Jones, 1980, observed that parents of educationally disadvantaged youngsters try to help at home (without advice or directions about how to help) even when they believe their children will fail or do poorly in school.

Less-educated parents may feel they are being asked to help frequently and feel more pressure to help if asked, even if the requests from teachers are not more frequent than those issued to high-educated parents. This explanation would apply to our pattern of results only if

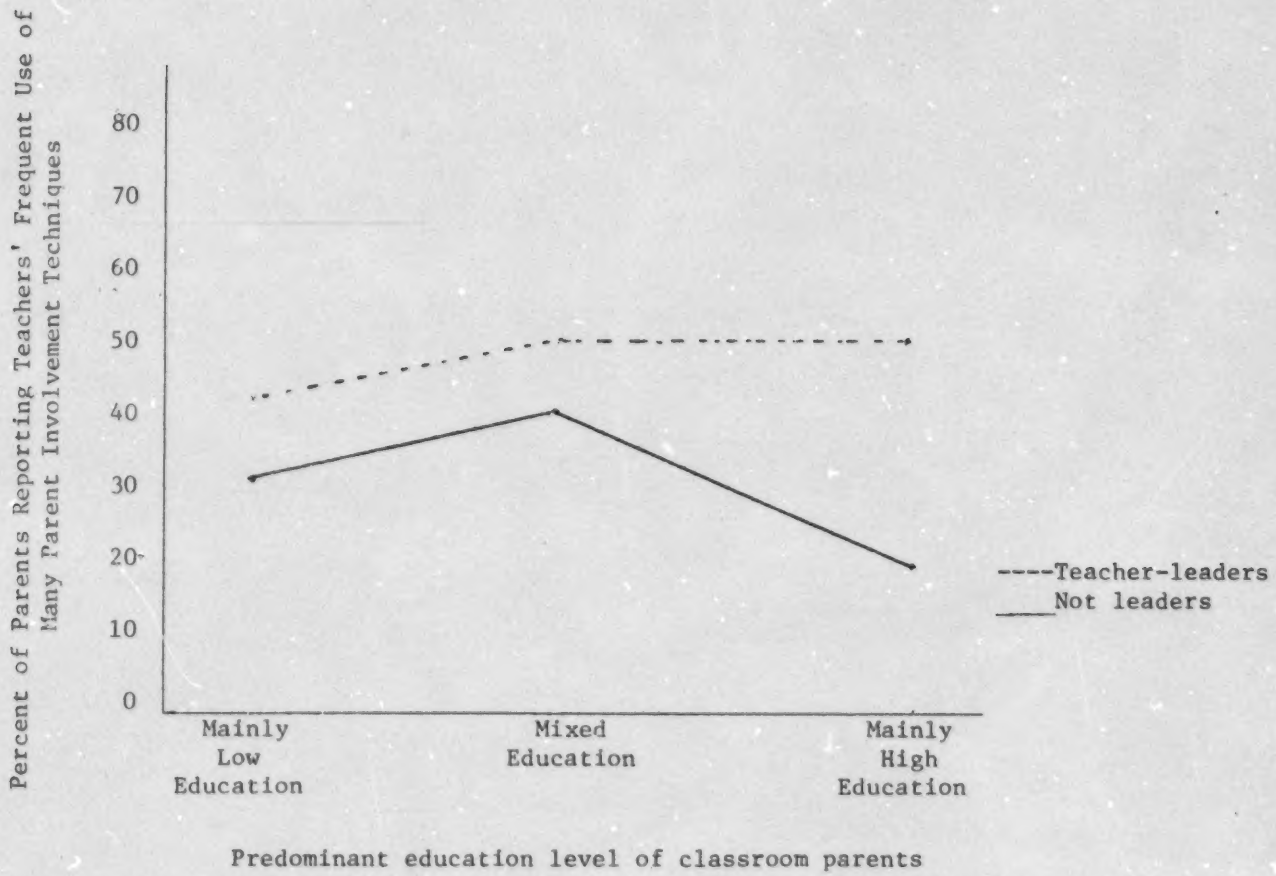
feelings of imposition and frustration are more prevalent when teachers do not have well-established, organized procedures for frequent parent involvement, or when the teachers communicate overtly or subtly their expectations that less-educated parents will not successfully complete the activities at home. This is a very subtle explanation for gross percentage differences, though Valentine and Stark, 1979, suggest that teachers ask parents to help even when the teachers expect failure.

Some might suggest that parents with little education just agree more often with survey questions, and that the patterns reflect response biases associated with educational level. This explanation would be plausible if we looked only at the general reports from parents by educational level. However, in the classrooms of teacher-leaders, parents of all educational levels reported about equal frequency of teachers' requests for involvement -- an unbiased pattern of responses.

Parent Education at the Classroom Level.

Figure 2 shows how the average education of parents at the classroom level affected reports about teacher practices of parent involvement. The top line of the graph shows that the emphasis on parent involvement was perceived similarly by parents in teacher-leaders' classrooms of mainly more-educated, average, or less-educated parents. Between 43% and 50% of the parents in classrooms of teacher-leaders reported frequent use of many parent involvement practices. The differences in percentages among these groups was not significant.

Figure 2. Percent of parents in classrooms with mainly high-, mixed-, and low-educated parents reporting frequency of teachers' uses of many parent-involvement techniques



In contrast, the bottom line of the graph shows that the emphasis on parent involvement was perceived differently by mainly high-, average-, and low-educated parents in non-leaders' classrooms. Teachers who were not leaders in parent involvement used significantly fewer home learning activities with mainly well-educated parents than with less well-educated parents.

There is not complete consensus of parents in any classrooms about the frequency of the teachers' uses of parent involvement techniques. Teachers do not always use the same techniques with all parents in the classroom. They are not equally effective with, nor equally understood by, 100% of the parents in any classroom. There are, however, clear differences in the perceptions of parents in teacher-leader and other teachers' classrooms, and there are dramatic differences in the experiences of well-educated parents in the classrooms of the two types of teachers.

Figure 2 shows that the pattern of results reported by individuals in Table 5 is influenced, in part, by the average education of the parents at the classroom level. The teachers who are not leaders in parent involvement had significantly different strategies of parent involvement with classrooms of high, average and low educated parents. They used more home learning activities in classrooms with less well-educated parents, and they did not emphasize parent involvement practices in classrooms with mainly well-educated parents. It is important that within classrooms of generally well-educated parents, there may be some children whose parents have average or little education. These parents

may not have the knowledge needed to help their children at home without direction from the teacher. The lack of emphasis on parent involvement may be especially detrimental to parents who are less educated than the majority of parents in the classroom, and whose children's teachers do not emphasize and assist parents with learning activities at home.

EFFECTS OF INVOLVEMENT ON PARENTS

Parent involvement practices may improve education if they lead to positive attitudes or behaviors in parents, teachers or students. We want to know if parents whose children's teachers frequently ask them to become involved in home learning activities differ from other parents in how they evaluate the child's school, teacher and educational program, and in how they feel about themselves as partners in the educational process. We need to know if the same results occur when parents are involved in any home-to-school communications and when they are involved in a formal program of frequent learning activities at home.

One way to examine the effects of teacher practices is to compare the responses of the groups of parents whose children are in different teachers' classrooms -- for example, to compare the average responses of parents whose children are in Mr. Brown's class with the responses of those whose children are in Ms. Smith's class. When the average responses of groups of parents are analyzed, we lose information about individual differences that exist within classrooms, but we gain an understanding of the general effects on the groups of children and families served by the teachers.

Regression analyses were conducted to determine how teacher leadership in parent involvement affects (1) parents' reactions to the teachers' efforts, and (2) parents' evaluations of teachers' merits. The analyses identified the unique effects of teacher practices, and the effects of other variables that were shown to influence teacher practices of parent involvement in earlier analyses of data from teachers (Becker and Epstein, 1982a,b). The regression analyses included three measures of the teaching situation -- grade level, teachers' quality rating from the principal, and teachers' education (highest degree); two measures of student characteristics -- the classroom level of performance in reading and math, and the racial composition of the class; and two measures of parent characteristics -- the educational level of the parents, and the extent of parent involvement at the school.

Some variables were not included in the model because they correlated highly with other variables -- for example, city location and racial composition of the classroom (i.e. a high proportion of black students are in the urban school district in our sample). Those two variables could not both be entered into the same equation without distorting the estimates of their effects (Gordon, 1968). Racial composition was used instead of location because the proportion of black and white students in classrooms varied across all the classrooms in the sample.

Table 6 summarizes how teacher practices of parent involvement affect parental reactions to the school program and parental evaluations of teachers' merits. We analyzed the effects on parents of three measures of teacher leadership: (1) teachers' reputations as teacher-leaders in

Table 6

Effects on parents' reactions and evaluations of three measures of teachers' leadership in parent involvement at the classroom level, N=82[a/] [b/]

(b = standardized regression coefficient)

Measure of Teachers' Leadership	Parents' Reactions to Teachers' Efforts				Parents' Evaluations of Teachers' Merits	
	Teacher works hard to interest parents	Teacher gives many ideas to parents	Parents think they should help	Parents know more about school program	Positive interpersonal skills	Excellence of teaching skills
	b	b	b	b	b	b
Reputation as a Teacher-leader in Parent Involvement[c/]	.243**	.268*	.081	.065	.251*	.274*
Parents' (Classroom) Agreement of Teacher's Use of Parent Involvement	.695**	.787**	.603**	.406**	.712**	.728**
Parents' (Classroom) Agreement of Teacher's Use of Other Communications	.356**	.216	.150	.231*	.373**	.581**
Other consistently significant variables	Grade Race[d/] Parent Education	Grade[d/] Parent Education[d/]	Grade Race Parent Education[d/]	Grade Race[d/] Parent Education	(None)	(None)

[a/] Standardized regression coefficients are reported so that comparisons of effects across measures can be made. *=Significant effect at the .05 level of significance; **=at or beyond the .01 level of significance.

[b/] Effects model included these independent variables, all at the classroom level: grade level, teacher overall quality, teacher's highest degree (measures of the teaching situation); performance level of students, racial composition of students (measures of student population); parents' education composition, degree of parent activity at school (measures of parent factors).

[c/] Reputation is the confirmation by principals of the teachers' reports of their leadership in the frequent use of parent involvement practices.

[d/] Not a significant variable when parents' agreement of teachers' practices is the measure of teacher's leadership.

parent involvement, (2) parents' consensus (at the classroom level) that the teacher is a frequent user of 12 techniques of parent involvement, and (3) parents' consensus (at the classroom level) that the teacher frequently communicates with parents by note, phone, memo, or conversations at school. These routine communications may or may not concern parent involvement in learning activities at home.

Parents' Awareness of Teacher Practices.

Three items measured parents' awareness of teacher practices. Parents were asked whether the teacher worked hard at getting parents excited about helping at home, whether they received most ideas for home learning from the teacher, and how often the teacher made it clear that they should help their child with homework.

Efforts of Teachers. According to parents, teachers who were considered leaders in parent involvement by principals or by parents were significantly more likely than other teachers to work hard at getting parents interested and excited in learning activities at home. Table 6 shows (column 1) that all three measures of teacher leadership affected parental estimates of teachers' efforts, but teacher practices of parent involvement in learning activities at home had the most dramatic effects on parents' reports of teachers' efforts.

Table 7 shows how the measures of teacher leadership and other variables in the model explain -- uniquely and in combination -- the effects on parents. The first three rows of the table report the contributions to the explained variance in reports that the teacher works hard to involve parents. Comparing the middle and right hand columns reveals two different patterns of effects of two of the measures of teacher leadership. The far right column shows that routine communications from the teacher to the family explained 20% of the variance in reports of teachers' efforts with no other variables in the equation (R2a), and 9% of the variance after all other variables in the model were taken into account (R2b). The middle column reveals that teacher practices of parent involvement explained 69% of the variance in reports that the teacher works hard, and 18% after all other variables were accounted for. The middle column of Table 7 shows that other variables in the model added little information (4% of the explained variance, R2c) after teacher practices were taken into account. The first and third columns of the table show that for reports that the teacher works hard, other variables -- especially grade level, racial composition, and parents' education -- contributed much information (over 40% of the explained variance) after the other measures of teacher leadership were accounted for.

Some variables did not help explain parental estimates of teachers' efforts. Notably, principals' ratings of teachers' overall competence, and teachers' advanced degrees and years of teaching experience did not affect parents' reports that teachers work hard to include parents in and excite them about learning activities at home.

Table 7

Explained variance in effects on parents of three measures of teacher leadership and other variables in the model[a/]

Parents' Reports of Effects		Percent Contribution to Explained Variance[b/] of Three Measures of Teacher Leadership: Teacher's Reputation as a Teacher-leader in Parent Involvement	Parents' (Classroom) Agreement of Teacher's Use of Parent Involvement	Parents' (Classroom) Agreement of Teacher's Use of Other Communications
Teacher works hard to interest and excite parents	R^2(a)	11	69	20
	R^2(b)	5	18	9
	R^2(c)	49	4	43
Teacher gives many ideas to parents	R^2(a)	8	30	10
	R^2(b)	6	23	3
	R^2(c)	18	13	13
Parents think they should help	R^2(a)	2	60	15
	R^2(b)	1	14	2
	R^2(c)	54	9	42
Parents know more about child's program	R^2(a)	2	43	17
	R^2(b)	0	6	3
	R^2(c)	42	7	30
Parents' ratings of teachers' interpersonal skills	R^2(a)	6	9	12
	R^2(b)	6	19	10
	R^2(c)	9	20	7
Parents' ratings of excellence of teaching skills	R^2(a)	10	22	28
	R^2(b)	7	20	24
	R^2(c)	14	16	13

[a/] Equations included these independent variables, all at the classroom level: Measure of teacher leadership in parent involvement; grade level, teacher overall quality, teacher's highest degree (measures of the teaching situation); performance level of students, racial composition of students (measures of student population); parents' education composition, degree of parent activity at school (measures of parent factors).

[b/] R^2(a) refers to the explained variance of the measure of teacher leadership before any independent variables are entered in the equation.

R^2(b) refers to the explained variance of the measure of teacher leadership after all independent variables are entered in the equation.

R^2(c) refers to the explained variance of all other independent variables after the measure of teacher leadership in parent involvement is entered in the equation.

R^2(a) + (c) equals the total explained variance for each effect.

Tables 6 and 7, then, clearly show that the teachers' skills in organizing and managing parent involvement activities were the most important criteria for positive reports from parents that the teacher works hard to interest and excite parents in the their children's education. These strategies and skills may be learned by teachers separately and in different ways from subject matter expertise and other teaching approaches.

Ideas for Teachers. Parents received most ideas for home learning activities from teachers who were rated by principals or by parents as leaders in parent involvement practices. Teachers' use of home learning activities (b=.787) was a far more important determinant of obtaining ideas from teachers than was the teacher's reputation for leadership in parent involvement (b=.268). Teachers' use of school-to-home communications was not a significant predictor of obtaining ideas from teachers. The leadership experienced by parents was more important for effects on parents than the leadership perceived by principals.

The second three rows of Table 7 report the initial (R2a) and unique (R2b) contributions of the measures of teacher leadership and of other variables (R2c) to the explained variance in reports of receiving most ideas for home learning activities from the teacher. The data indicate clearly that the variance in parents' receipt of ideas that was uniquely explained by the teacher practices of parent involvement (23%) was from 4 to 8 times the variance explained by the other measures of teacher leadership.

Encouragement from Teachers. Parents thought they should help when teachers frequently asked them to help. When teachers engaged parents in home learning activities, parents felt the obligation to help at home (b=.603). Neither the teachers' reputations as leaders (b=.081) nor just any communications (b=.150) affected parents' feelings that they should help their child on school activities at home.

Table 7 (rows 7 to 9) shows the dramatic differences in the three measures of teacher leadership in their contributions to the explained variance in parents' beliefs that they should help at home. Other variables in the model added only 9% to knowledge about parents' beliefs after teacher practices were accounted for (R2c), but other variables contributed from 42% to 54% to the explained variance when routine communications or teacher reputation was the measure of teacher leadership in the equation.

Effects on Parents' Knowledge About School

Increased understanding of the instructional program. Parent involvement should produce increased parental knowledge about school. In our survey we asked parents to indicate if they "understood more this year than (they) did last year about what (their) child is being taught in school." Parents increased their understanding about school when the teacher frequently used parent involvement practices (b=.406) and when the teacher frequently communicated with the family (b=.231), as shown in Table 6. Principals' estimates of teacher leadership did not affect parents' knowledge about the instructional program (b=.065). Only the

direct experiences with the teacher -- through requests for parent involvement or other information about school -- increased parents' understanding of their children's educational program.

Table 7 (rows 10 to 12) shows that 43% of the variance in improved parent understanding about school instruction was explained if all we knew was whether most parents of children in the teachers' classrooms agreed that the teacher frequently used parent involvement techniques. In contrast, only 15% of the variance was explained if all we knew was that most parents in the classroom agreed that the teacher frequently used other types of communications to the family, and less than 2% of the variance in parent understanding was explained by the teachers' reputational leadership in the use of parent involvement.

Parents of children in younger grades, in predominantly black classes, and in classes with predominantly low-educated parents also reported that they understand more about the school program than they did in prior years. It is understandable that parents with younger children or less education have more room for new knowledge about the particular instructional program their children follow than do parents of children in the older grades or parents with more experience in schools. The independent effects we found also reflect teachers' efforts to reach and teach parents of new students, educationally disadvantaged, or other high-risk students. Rubin et. al, 1983, found that mothers in urban areas who were involved in parental activities at school or with a home visitor changed most in their behavior toward their children and in their opinions about themselves. Parent involve-

ment intervention programs such as those in Oakland, Detroit, Miami, and Arlington make special efforts to reach low-achieving children and less-educated parents to involve them in learning activities at home (Safran and Moles, 1980). What is as or more important is the finding that parents whose children's teachers use frequent parent involvement practices continue to say that they know more than they did before about their child's instructional program, regardless of the grade level, racial composition, and parent education composition of the classroom.

Effects on Parents' Evaluations of Teachers' Merits

Parents were asked to evaluate teachers on two dimensions -- interpersonal skills and professional merit.

Evaluating Teachers' Interpersonal Skills. Parents were asked to judge the quality of their interpersonal contacts with the teacher by rating five positive characteristics of interpersonal contacts (cooperation, friendliness, respect, trust, and warmth) and five negative characteristics (conflict, misunderstanding, distance, lack of concern, and tenseness). An index of the number of positive characteristics minus the number of negative ratings was constructed. Table 6 shows that all three measures of teacher leadership -- principals' ratings of teachers' reputations, parents' ratings of teachers' frequent use of parent involvement activities, and parents' reports of frequent use of other school-to-home communications -- had strong positive effects on parental ratings of teachers' interpersonal skills. Parents rated teachers most positively if the teachers made positive and frequent overtures to the

parents (b=.712). These ratings suggest that, in general, teacher practices of parent involvement maximize cooperation and minimize antagonisms between teachers and parents. Most parents (94%) disagreed that "it is not the teacher's business" to show parents how to help their child learn at home. And, when teachers frequently used home learning activities, parents perceived the teachers as more interpersonally skillful. Because these analyses are based on classroom level measures that represent the general estimate of the parents of all children in the classroom, the results do not reflect personal favoritism in the relationships of a few parents and teachers.

Table 7 (rows 13 to 15) shows that teacher practices of parent involvement added 19% (R2b) to the explained variance in parents' ratings of interpersonal skills after all other variables in the model were taken into account -- more than three times the unique contribution of teachers' reputational leadership and about twice the contribution of teachers' general school-to-home communications with parents.

Evaluating Teacher Quality. Parents were asked to evaluate teachers on overall teaching quality using a six-point scale from poor to outstanding. Parental evaluations of teachers' merits were significantly and positively affected by all three measures of teacher leadership in parent involvement -- parents' estimates of frequent use of home learning activities (b=.728), parents' estimates of frequent communications with the family (b=.581), and principals' ratings (b=.274). Teachers who were leaders in parent involvement or used frequent communications

with parents were viewed more positively and were considered by parents to be better teachers than those who did not emphasize parent involvement or other communications between school and home.

These analyses examined the three types of teacher leadership in parent involvement in separate equations. In other analyses we asked whether teacher practices of parent involvement maintained independent effects on parents after the frequency of general school-to-home communication was taken into account. In every instance -- for awareness of teachers' efforts, improved parental knowledge, and ratings of teachers' merits -- the frequency of teacher practices of parent involvement in learning activities at home continued to have significant positive effects, after home-to-school communications were accounted for. By contrast, the positive effects of teachers' use of general, home-to-school communications did not continue to have positive effects on parent reactions to and ratings of schools and teachers after the actual classroom practices of parent involvement were taken into account. The exception to this pattern was a continuing independent effect of communications, net of parent involvement on parental ratings of teachers' overall merit.

Parents' reports within classrooms vary -- some parents are more positive than others. In classroom groups, however, more parents agree about the teachers' efforts and merits if the teachers include more parents in their children's learning activities at home.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

It is important for teachers to learn more about parents' reactions and experiences. It is equally important for parents to know how their own reactions and experiences compare to those of other parents inside and outside their own school and district. This study highlights some important facts for teachers and parents:

- Parents of children in Maryland's elementary schools have, in general, positive attitudes about public elementary schools and teachers. They believe the schools are generally well-run, comfortable places for parents to visit and assist, and that the goals of the teachers are similar to the goals that the parents have for their children.

- Despite generally positive attitudes, the schools could do more to involve parents in learning activities to help their children at home, and teachers could do more to show respect for the perspectives of parents.

- Surprisingly large numbers of parents are excluded from some of the most basic, traditional communications from the school -- such as specific notes, conversations, phone calls, or conferences with teachers.

- Few parents are involved <u>at school</u>. Although having even a few parents in the classroom may assist the teacher, the number of active parents at school does not affect the attitudes or knowledge of the other parents who are not active at the school.

- Parents are aware of and respond to teachers' efforts to involve them in learning activities at home. Parents recognize some of the same leadership qualities that principals identify in teachers, but parents are also aware of the daily efforts of many teachers who are not acknowledged as leaders by the principals. There is a supply of cooperative parental energy that some teachers have captured and coordinated in their instructional program.

- In teacher-leader classrooms, parents at all educational levels report frequent parent involvement. In other teachers' classrooms, parents with less formal schooling report more frequent requests than do other parents to help their child at home. Teacher-leaders seem to conduct more equitable programs, reaching all or most parents as part of their teaching philosophy and instructional strategy. Other teachers may choose not to involve parents whose children are doing well in school. Their selective use of parent involvement, however, is more often built on negative expectations of a parent's, and possibly a child's ability to succeed.

- Parents may be asked to conduct a few learning activities from time to time to help their child at home, but most parents are not involved in an organized program with a variety of frequently-used activities. Thus, parents' repertories of helping skills are not built over the school years, and tend to taper off or disappear as the child progresses through school.

- Parents' reports indicate that teacher practices <u>can</u> affect parent responses. Some teachers have built parent involvement practices

into their instructional program with a variety of frequently-used techniques. Parents with children in these teachers' classrooms tend to be more aware of teachers' efforts, accept more ideas from teachers, know more about their child's instructional program and rate the teachers higher in interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality. Teachers' actual practices have consistently strong and positive effects on parent reactions to the school program and on parent evaluations of teachers' merits for parents at all educational levels, net of all other variables.

- Parents' ratings of teachers' interpersonal skills and teaching abilities are strongly affected by the teachers' use of parent involvement in learning activities at home and the teachers' use of other home-school communications. Regardless of other characteristics of the teaching situation, teachers who work at parent involvement and family-school communications are considered better teachers than those who are more isolated from the families of the children they teach.

Two of the findings require additional discussion. First, the grade level of the children taught was one of the most important independent variables in our surveys of teachers and parents. Second, there are interesting practical implications of the parents' reports about what they <u>should do</u>, <u>can do</u>, <u>do in fact do</u>, and <u>could do</u> in learning activities at home.

The Importance of Grade Level

In the survey of teachers, grade level taught was an important predictor of use of parent involvement practices in learning activities at home and as school volunteers (Becker and Epstein, 1982a,b). Parents with children in earlier elementary grades also reported significantly more frequent use of parent involvement, more frequent communications from school to family, and more frequent participation by parent volunteers in the school and classroom. Certain parent involvement practices were more frequently used at the lower grade levels -- reading aloud or listening to the child read, giving spelling or math drills, and playing learning games. Other techniques were used more with older children -- entering contracts and signing homework. Still others were used about equally with children at all grade levels -- discussing school with children at home.

Parents with children in grades 1, 3 and 5 felt differently about their participation in parent involvement activities. Parents of older elementary children more frequently said that they did not have enough training to help their children in reading and math activities at home. They reported that they did help their children, but that they felt less confident about their help with specific skill subjects (Epstein, 1983). This inadequacy was expressed even after parental education level was taken into account. There was, then, less use and less confidence in helping in the upper grades.

One interpretation of these results is that there is a "lack of momentum" in teachers' efforts to involve parents of older children with

the same frequency and enthusiasm that teachers show with parents of children in the earlier grades. Compared with parents of first or third graders, fewer parents of fifth grade students say that the teacher works hard to involve parents or gives them many ideas for home learning activities. It may be more difficult to involve parents in learning activities if the abilties and needs of children in the upper grades are more diversified and the academic content is more complex. Teachers would have to spend more time planning individually appropriate activities for students who would benefit from help from parents. The data show, however, that when teachers at all grade levels involve parents frequently in home learning activities, they can positively affect the attitudes and ratings of parents.

There are two important patterns in the results. For some parent reactions and evaluations, grade level appears important <u>until</u> the teacher practices of parent involvement are entered in the model. This is true for parents' reports that teachers work hard and give many ideas to involve parents in learning activities at home, and for parents' evaluations of teachers' interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality. The significance of grade level for these effects on parents disappears when teacher practices of parent involvement are taken into account. This means that teachers can work with parents, give them ideas for home learning, and improve parents' evaluations of the teacher no matter what the grade level of the children. For other parent reactions and evaluations, grade level remains an important variable even <u>after</u> teacher practices are taken into account. This is true for parents' reports that they should help and can help their child at home,

and for their feelings that they know more about the instructional program than in previous years. In these cases, teacher practices are more effective at the earlier grade levels.

What SHOULD, CAN, DO, COULD parents do at home?

There are interesting differences in the reports from parents of whether they think the teacher wants them to help their children (i.e., that they should help), whether they think they have enough training to help their children in reading and math (i.e., that they can help), whether they actually spend time assisting and supervising homework and learning activities at home (i.e., that they do help), and whether they say they could give more help on school work to their children at home (i.e., that they could help if given directions by the teacher).

Parents think they should help if the teachers give them learning activities to do at home. Other kinds of communications from teachers' and principals' ratings of teachers' reputations for leadership or excellence do not affect parents' beliefs that they should help with home learning activities. More parents of younger children, more parents with children in predominately black schools, and more parents whose childrens' teachers have advanced degrees or educational credits feel they should help, whether or not teachers frequently use parent involvement practices.

Parents' feelings that they can help, that they have adequate training to help their children with reading and math, is a judgment based primarily on their education and their children's grade level. Parents

say they can help if they have more education or if their children are in the lower elementary grades where less specialized knowledge is needed to help the children (Epstein, 1983). Teachers' practices of parent involvement have no independent effects on parents' feelings that they can help with reading and math.

Despite differences in parents' feelings that they should help or can help with homework, most parents do help. Only 8% of the parents reported they never helped their child with reading and math skills during the school year, whether or not they were asked to do so by the teacher. Most parents reported, too, that they could help more if the teacher showed them what to do.

The differences in explanatory factors for the variables should help, can help, do help, and could help suggest how educators could organize programs of parent involvement to meet specific objectives. For example, teachers who want parents to think that they should help will be most successful if they organize a program of frequent learning activities at home that includes instructions and expectations for action.

If teachers want parents to feel confident that they can help, they or their school administrators would need to organize and conduct workshops for parents in how to help in reading and math. As Ogbu, 1974, points out, parents' lack of knowledge does not mean lack of interest. Workshops or special instruction would be less necessary with well-educated parents who already feel confident about helping their children with reading and math and who readily ask teachers questions about how to help (Litwak and Meyers, 1974). Workshops would also be less neces-

sary if parental assistance is requested or required for subjects other than reading and math, because parents seem more confident that they can help their children in other subjects. Parents of younger children tend to feel already that they can help, but the parents of older students may need especially clear and sequential guidance from teachers. Special assistance to build and maintain confidence of parents with children in the upper elementary grades may be especially important.

Because parents do help whether or not they are asked to do so by the teacher, teachers who are not already using parent involvement techniques could decide how to use this unsolicited help most effectively. Because parents say they could help more if shown how to, teachers might consider the reorganization of activities to use more parents more often to assist the goals of the school program.

The message from parents is that parent involvement is first and foremost an activity that can be supported by just about all parents at home. The message for teachers is that many parents help their children with or without the teacher's instruction or assistance, and many would benefit from directions or ideas from the teacher that could be useful for the child's progress in school.

When teachers use parent involvement activities, are they fulfilling or shirking responsibility? grasping at brass rings or grasping at straws? displaying strengths or displaying weakness in requesting help from parents? These data suggest that from the parents' perspective, teachers' uses of parent involvement in learning activities at home is a teaching strength. Frequent use of parent involvement results in larger

collections of ideas for parents to use at home, increased understanding by parents of school programs, and higher ratings of teacher quality.

How good and how important is the help children receive at home from parents? The current study has collected data about the effects of teacher practices and parent involvement on the children's achievements and attitudes about school and learning. Analyses of these data will be reported in a future paper.

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